

Policy framework: Collaboration and support for active student life

Introduction

The University of Groningen (UG) sets great store by allowing students to orientate and develop themselves — both within and outside the curriculum. When referring to the extracurricular aspects of student life, the *Strategic Plan 2021-2026 Making Connections* cites as one of its aims: “to [...] facilitate and [...] guide the success of students by creating an environment [...] that allows room for individuals to stand out, to develop their academic and personal potential, and to take part in all aspects of student life, including sport, culture, and student amenities”.

Active student life

In line with the above, active student life is described as the entire network of student representatives (assessors), consultative participation bodies (University Council, Faculty Council, Programme Committees), student organizations (study, sport, social, culture, and other), and student amenities.

The UG has developed various instruments to promote this active student life in Groningen, ranging from consultative structures to facilities offering financial assistance.

Objectives

This document provides a framework for making policy-based decisions about collaborating with, and supporting, active student life. In turn, the policy framework serves as a guideline for the decision-making process regarding collaboration with, and support for, active student life. In addition, the policy framework also includes information for other stakeholders about the various roles and positioning of active student life in relation to the UG.

Contents

The document deals with the following subjects in the following order 1) the UG’s vision regarding active student life; 2) the various responsibilities and positioning that correspond with the diverse roles in active student life; 3) the support offered to active student life by the UG; and 4) the basic principles that lead to policy-based decisions about collaboration with, and support for, active student life.

Accountability

This policy framework was devised on the basis of conversations with various student organizations and current and former student representatives. These conversations helped the authors to formulate a vision of active student life.

As well as conversations with stakeholders from active student life, the current policy framework of the Central Executive Board for Student Organizations (CUOS) was taken into account. The

CUOS policy framework is embedded in this new policy framework and, once this policy framework has been approved, will become part of this policy framework.

1. Vision of active student life

The *Strategic Plan 2021-2026 Making Connections* formulates the UG's vision of active student life as follows:

“[Th]e UG [supports] a network of student organizations, study associations, and student consultative bodies, which enable students to look after themselves and become responsible members of the community. Two of the most important features of student life are autonomy and self-reliance; these qualities are reflected in a high level of student participation on all fronts, both within the UG and in student life outside the University. Student assessors sit on the Board of the University and on Faculty Boards, and students have a direct say in decision making through membership of student councils, participation councils, and advisory councils. The study organizations offer intra and extracurricular activities aimed at making students more successful. The UG gives financial and other forms of support to the many successful student and study associations run by students, both in Groningen and in the wider region.”

So students do not only develop within the confines of the University, but also in a broader context. The UG considers it important to create a culture in which all students feel safe and free to take an active part in the university community; a culture that encourages personal development, while keeping a close eye on common interests.

The various bodies, facilities, organizations, and associations that together make up active student life are important in terms of the contribution they make to:

- The integration of students into the city and academic life at the University;
- The formation of social ties and safety nets (in a challenging period of study);
- Their initial contact with their future professional field;
- Students' personal development.

Active student life gives students an opportunity to develop and practise their autonomy and self-reliance. Furthermore, the experience and skills they acquire at University will stand them in good stead for the rest of their working life. As members of a close academic community, students can encourage each other to take responsibility for their personal growth, their development, and well-being, as well as for the society in which they live. In this way, active student life encourages students to connect with others, with the academic community, and with society as a whole. So active student life contributes to the social and academic integration of students— and ultimately to their success and well-being.

2. Roles within active student life

2.1 Consultative participation: the University Council, the Faculty Council and the Programme Committees¹

The responsibilities of these consultative participation bodies are laid down in the Higher Education and Research Act (*Wet op het Hoger onderwijs en Wetenschappelijk onderzoek: WHW*).

The consultative participation body at institution level at the UG is the University Council. The University Council comprises 12 student members and 12 staff members. The staff contingent is elected by staff members, and the student members are elected by students. The University Council is responsible for considering the views and interests of staff and students concerning policy and decision-making, within the context of the University's objectives regarding teaching and research. The Council aims to promote openness, transparency and mutual discussion within the University, guards against any form of discrimination, and promotes equal treatment and the inclusion of minority groups from society. The University Council has the authority to make suggestions to the Board of the University and to make suggestions and voice its opinions on all University-related matters. The University Council has the right of consent concerning certain subjects (for example, the institutional plan, and the outlines of the annual budget), and the right to prior consultation regarding other matters (for example, in the case of a reorganization). The rules for the various subjects are laid down in law.

The Faculty Council is the consultative participation body at the faculty level. The Faculty Council comprises students and staff members. It is authorized to make suggestions to the Faculty Board on all Faculty matters. The Faculty Council has the right of consent concerning certain parts of the Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER). In addition, the Faculty Council has the right of consent concerning the Faculty Regulations.

The Programme Committee is the consultative participation body at the programme level, and like the University Council and Faculty Council, is made up of students and staff members. It is the Programme Committee's duty to give advice on promoting and upholding the quality of degree programmes. The Programme Committee has the right of consent on certain parts of the Teaching and Examination Regulations and the right to prior consultation on other parts. Programme Committees are also involved in the accreditation process for their degree programme.

2.2 Student-assessor on the Board of the University and Faculty student-assessors

The Student-assessor on the Board of the University/Faculty Board represents the voice of the student community on the Board. This is therefore the primary responsibility of the assessor. In order to fulfil this task, the assessor must stay in close contact with the student community. An assessor is not a Board member with decision-making rights, but attends meetings to present the student perspective so that the Board can make balanced decisions. The student-assessor on the Board of the University is also responsible for organizing and coordinating the TOP

¹ Description based on the following [page](#).

consultations (CUOS, KEI, ESN, and ACLO Foundations, and the various University parties). The assessor ensures that administrative support and/or substantive experts can be consulted so that input from the student community is used when developing policy. The assessor facilitates contact between Board management and students.

2.3 The Central Executive Board for Student Associations (CUOS)

The CUOS is an umbrella organization that facilitates student organizations. The role of the CUOS is to advise the Board of the University about UG policy relating to support for student organizations. In addition, since 2005, the CUOS is also in charge of funding for student organizations and allocating them accommodation. The CUOS management is mandated and appointed by the Board of the University. In this respect, the tasks of the CUOS are:

1. taking decisions regarding the recognition of student organizations
2. allocating the budget set by the Board of the University for such organizations
3. managing the accommodation made available by the Board of the University for student organizations
4. advising the Board of the University on the re-evaluation and assessment of organizations that are, or want to be, included in the Graduation Fund Regulations

1. Taking decisions regarding the recognition of student organizations (for the purposes of inclusion in the Graduation Fund Regulations)

Student organization committees can apply to the CUOS to be included in the Graduation Fund Regulations. Inclusion in the Graduation Fund Regulations means that an organization is recognized, making the student committee eligible for committee grants. The CUOS Board suggests an amount for committee grants and asks the Board of the University for a decision, and the University Council for approval.

2 and 3. The allocation of the budget (various grants) set by the Board of the University, and management of the accommodation allocated to the student organizations by the Board of the University;

The CUOS allocates a number of grants on behalf of the Board of the University, and also manages buildings providing office space for student organizations. This concerns the following grants:

- Activity grant and accommodation: this may be allocated to all organizations in the 'other organizations' category. The activity grant is intended for the organization of activities for the target group, in line with the organization's objectives. N.B.: Study associations, sports clubs, cultural organizations, and social clubs are not eligible for this grant.
- Internationalization and inclusion grants: this grant is aimed at promoting internationalization and inclusion in all existing student organizations.
- Establishment Grants for International Student Organizations: this grant is intended to encourage international students to join together in organizations. The grant can be used

to *establish* an organization for international students.

- Campaign grant: candidate student parties that are registered with the Central Voting Office for the election of student members to the University Council, are eligible for this grant.
- One-off grants: these grants are available for the short and medium term. They are often allocated for one-off situations, such as the welfare grant, COVID-19 grant, or grants relating to the Management and Supervision of Legal Entities Act.

4. Advising the Board of the University on the re-evaluation and assessment of organizations that are, or want to be, included in the Graduation Fund Regulations

The various categories of student organizations are reviewed in three-year cycles. This involves assessing whether any changes to the administrative burden, as defined in the Graduation Fund Regulations, have taken place, and whether the organization still meets the conditions for inclusion in the Graduation Fund. The CUOS takes account of a number of variables during its review, which is carried out according to a pre-agreed framework (from 2019). The exact terms of the framework are not shared with the student organizations to prevent organizations tailoring their applications to suit the assessment framework.

2.4 Student organizations: study associations, student associations, sports clubs, cultural & other organizations

Student organizations come in all shapes and sizes, but the common characteristic of student organizations is that they are independent foundations or associations and as such, are not accountable to the UG management. As a result, they do not have any formal responsibilities within the University. There are four types of student organizations:

- Study associations are associations that are connected to one or more academic specializations at the UG. Most study associations offer social and educational activities to both members and non-members. Many of them also organize introductions, information events, and activities aimed at employability.
- Student associations, also known as ‘social clubs’ focus more on the social side of student life. Student associations are usually based in the city and organize activities for their members. Members are students of the UG, Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen, or vocational education institutions.
- Sports clubs are organizations linked to a particular type of sport. Sports clubs vary greatly in size and facilities. Some sports clubs have their own facilities (training grounds/accommodation, clubhouse, bar/restaurant), and some make use external facilities, such as the Sports Centre.
- Cultural and other student organizations are organizations that do not come under one of the above-mentioned categories and often offer niche-activities (such as drama and dance societies).

2.5 Student facilities

Finally, some student facilities are provided within the context of (active) student life. These facilities are open to all students. Their activities are typically funded (or partially funded) with a fixed annual activity grant from the UG. These facilities are a standard item in the Graduation Fund Regulations. They include:

- The KEI Foundation: KEI is in charge of organizing the general introduction week for students of the UG, Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen, and increasingly, other vocational education institutions.
- ESN: ESN is responsible for organizing the biennial introduction activities for Dutch and international students, and plays an active part throughout the year in helping to forge ties within the student community. ESN focuses on international and internationally oriented students.
- ACLO: the ACLO sports centre provides a wide range of sports for students studying at the UG and Hanze UAS Groningen.
- Usva: Usva is a cultural facility, which offers students at the UG and Hanze UAS Groningen activities relating to culture.

The student society for philosophical organizations in Groningen (*Studentenkoepel voor Levensbeschouwelijke Organisaties in Groningen*: SKLO) has a separate status: it serves as an overarching organization for the student associations affiliated to it, and organizes activities for a broader target group of students. The SKLO stimulates and supports students to consider life questions by promoting activities, offering financial support, and encouraging collaboration between the organizations concerned. The organizations themselves organize and arrange a diverse range of activities relating to life philosophy. The SKLO provides an overview of these initiatives, acts as a recognizable point of contact, and acquires grants and funding to make the activities possible. In addition, the SKLO does not only coordinate the various organizations, but also organizes activities that are not specifically aimed at the members of the organizations involved (including Life Philosophy Night and the All Ears project). In this respect, the SKLO acts as a bridge between various student organizations, students, and institutes of higher education.

3. Support from the UG

The UG is not primarily responsible for what goes on in active student life. Student organizations and student facilities are legal entities in their own right. As set out in the vision on active student life, these organizations are an important part of the social and academic integration and professional and personal development of UG students. This is why the UG provides additional support to student organizations and amenities, alongside its statutory support obligations. The UG provides several different types of support:

1. Financial support to student committees and consultative participation bodies (statutory);
2. Financial support to student committees and consultative participation bodies in the shape of grants;
3. Accommodation for student committees and consultative participation bodies;
4. Other types of support.

3.1 Financial support to student committees and consultative participation bodies (statutory)

This type of support is laid down in Article 7.51 of the Higher Education and Research Act. Institutes of Higher Education are legally obliged to provide financial support to students who fall behind in their studies due to extraordinary circumstances. The Higher Education and Research Act defines these extraordinary circumstances, among which are membership of the committee of a recognized student organization, membership of a consultative participation body, and the job of student representative (e.g. student assessors) (Article 7.51(2a) of the Higher Education and Research Act). So the Higher Education and Research Act makes financial support for active student committee members compulsory. This is effectuated by allocating committee grant months.

The level of these committee grant months varies per student committee member/representative and is specified in the Graduation Fund Regulations (part B). Student organizations must satisfy a number of conditions in order to be included in the Graduation Fund Regulations, and therefore be eligible for a committee grant. These conditions include: the student organization must focus on the student community at the UG and/or Hanze UAS Groningen, the executive committee must consist of students, the student organization must promote a positive image of the UG, or the UG and Hanze UAS Groningen and of Groningen as a student city, it must have signed the Code of Conduct for Groningen Student Associations and Organizations, and it must comply with the agreements made in the UG and Hanze UAS Introduction Period Regulations. A complete overview is given in the Graduation Fund Regulations.

As well as financial support from the Graduation Fund, under certain conditions, students may be eligible for the waiving of tuition fees. This form of support ensues from the Higher Education and Research Act, Article 7.47(a). A student who has had their tuition fees waived is exempt from paying statutory tuition fees for one academic year.

3.2 Financial support to student committees and consultative participation bodies on the basis of grants

The CUOS allocates grants to student organizations and University Council parties (see definition of the CUOS remit). Applications for these grants are sent to the CUOS and the CUOS Board assesses the applications and decides whether to allocate funding.

3.3 Accommodation for student committees and consultative participation bodies

The CUOS divides accommodation between several student organizations and University Council parties. The CUOS assessment considers the organization's administrative burden and need for office space, and the need for support in relation to the organization's material resources. Study, student, sports, and cultural organizations are not eligible for accommodation. Study associations usually have accommodation in their faculty buildings.

3.4 Other types of support

The UG currently provides several types of 'other support'.

Students in a consultative participation body may be given support with campaign activities (i.e. to inform voters) during elections. The extent to which this facility is used varies per faculty. Since 2023, the UG has had a University-wide consultative participation coordinator, who can be consulted for various types of support and development questions. The consultative participation coordinator regularly advises the University Council, Faculty Councils and Programme Committees about their tasks, rights, and obligations. These bodies can also request a workshop relating to their remit. In addition, e-learning for consultative participation bodies is currently being developed (available from September 2024).

Every year, the Advisory Committee for Introductory Periods and Incidents (ACII) invites student organizations to submit their safety plans and detailed activity plans for introduction activities for first-year students/new members for advice. The ACII provides guidelines for drawing up these safety plans and gives additional advice once they have been compiled. In addition, the ACII collects reports about incidents throughout the year via a web form. If required, the ACII can contact the student organization after a report to give advice about how to deal with the incident, and how to prevent similar incidents in the future. The ACII is a committee that comes under the UG and Hanze UAS Groningen.

Since 2022, the UG has also been providing information and peer support to confidential advisor intermediaries working for study associations. This is a partnership between the Office of the Confidential Advisor, the Student Service Centre, and the Department of Strategy, Education, and Students. In 2023, a training course in conversation techniques was added to the range of support and offered to all student organizations. Finally, every year, the Student Service Centre invites all committees and confidential advisor intermediaries working for student organizations to a suicide prevention training course.

4. Basic principles for policy-based decisions

As explained in Paragraph 1 'Vision of active student life', the UG sets great store by the various actors that work together to shape active student life at our university. Paragraph 2 'Roles within active student life' describes how students are active, their aims when being active, and the bodies within which they are active. Paragraph 3 'Support from the UG' sets out the various types of support currently on offer.

The following basic principles have been defined to help make policy-based decisions about collaborating with, and supporting, active student life:

4.1 Basic principles

1. Collaboration/support must clearly and structurally promote:
 - a) the integration of students in the city and into academic life at the University;
 - b) social relationships and safety nets;
 - c) contact with the future professional field;
 - d) the personal development of students.
2. Collaboration or support must comply with the University's statutory obligations, as defined in the Higher Education and Research Act. Examples of statutory obligations that may require collaboration and support include:
 - a) Article 1.3.5 of the Act. 'personal development of students and encouragement of their sense of social responsibility';
 - b) Article 7.34.1.e of the Act: enrolled students are entitled to 'study progress supervision';
 - c) Contributing to socially safe study and living conditions, and the UG's duty of care to the students in this respect.
3. Collaboration must be in line with existing roles or, in the case of a new role, fill a clearly defined vacuum in respect of the objectives described above.
4. Collaboration must be in line with existing types of support or, in the case of a new type of support, fill a clearly defined vacuum in respect of the objectives described above.

4.2 Points for concern

In terms of the basic principles, it is important to pay attention to the number of students that will be affected if support or collaboration is changed. The support, financial or otherwise, must be weighed up against the impact on students and the size of the target group.

The dividing line between public and private activities is a constant point for concern. In principle, the law does not permit a public institution (the University) to provide private activities (to independent foundations/associations, such as student organizations). The test is whether activities comply with, or are a continuation of, the funded statutory remit of the University. There is therefore more scope for contributing to types of collaboration and support with a clear link to our statutory task than when the connection is indirect at the most.

Principles of cooperation and support for active student life

01

CONTRIBUTES TO THE UG VISION ON ACTIVE STUDENT LIFE

The collaboration/support contributes to promoting:

- students' integration into the city and academic life at the university;
- social relations and safety nets;
- contacts with the future work field; and/or personal development of students.

The cooperation/support is in line with the university's legal duties, as also described in, among others, the WHW. (Dutch Law on higher education)

02

COMPLIES WITH LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

03

FITS WITHIN EXISTING ROLES

The collaboration/support fits within existing roles or fills a gap when it comes to the goals defined above.

The cooperation complements existing forms of support or - as far as a new form of support is concerned - fills a clearly defined gap when it comes to the goals defined above

04

ALIGNS WITH EXISTING SUPPORT

When adjusting support and cooperation, it should:

- be considered whether the (financial) support outweighs the impact on students and the size of the target group.
- be clear that the dividing line between public and private activities is not violated. The activities must be in line with, or an extension of, the university's funded statutory task.